

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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R 201559Z MAR 75
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3470
INFO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

S E C R E T BEIRUT 3501

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, LE, SY
SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER TAQLA ON SYRIA AND SYRIAN/LEBANESE
RELATIONS

1. THIS MORNING DURING GENERAL DISCUSSION FONMIN TAQLA SAID HE WISHED TO TOUCH UPON SOMETHING VERY CONFIDENTIALLY, I.E. THE SYRIAN SITUATION. HE SAID HE HAS THE IMPRESSION THA THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE SYRIAN AND IRAQI BAATH IS CURRENTLY AT A NEW HIGH. THIS HE NOTES AMONG THE SUPPORTERS OF THE TWO CAMPS IN THE LEBANON, BUT ALSO SAYS HE HAS CERTAIN "INDICATIONS" THAT IN SYRIA ITSELF THE CONFLICT IS ASSUMING IMPORTANT PROPORTIONS. HE THEN INQUIRED WHETHER WE HAD ANY INFORMATION AS TO THE POSITION OF PRESIDENT ASAD IN SYRIA, WHO, TAQLA SENSES, IS ENCOUNTERING INCREASING INTERNAL OPPOSITION. HE HAS NOTHING HARD TO GO ON, BUT HE JUST HAS THIS IMPRESSION.

2. I TOLD TAQLA THAT AS FAR AS I WAS AWARE, AMBASSADOR MURPHY HAD NOT REPORTED ANY DETERIORATION OF PRESIDENT ASAD'S POSITION AND THAT MY CONVERSATIONS WITH DIPLOMATIC COLLEAGUES IN BEIRUT WHO WERE ACCREDITED ALSO TO DAMASCUS HAD NOT INDICATED ANY SUCH PREOCCUPATIONS. TAQLA SAID HE WAS RELIEVED BY WHAT I TOLD HIM BUT I HASTENED TO ADD THAT I WAS A POOR ONE TO DISCUSS SYRIAN MATTERS, BUT THAT I WOULD BE GLAD TO BRING

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HIS VIEWS TO THE PERSONAL ATTENTION OF AMBASSADADOR

MURPHY .

3. I THEN WENT ON TO INQUIRE OF TAQLA AS TO HIS EVALUATION OF THE SYRIAN ROLE IN THE RECENT DISTURBANCES IN SIDON. HE SAID THAT HE HAD REASON TO BE QUITE CERTAIN THAT THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT'S ATTITUDE ON SIDON WAS CONSTRUCTIVE. HE SAID INSTRUCTIONS HAD BEEN GIVEN TO SAIQA ELEMENTS TO DO WHAT THEY COULD TO ASSIST THE LEBANESE AUTHORITIES IN EVERY WAY POSSIBLE AND TO AVOID CONTRIBUTING IN ANY MANNER TO THE TROUBLES. HE SAID THAT AT FIRST, PRIOR TO RECEIVING INSTRUCTIONS FROM DAMASCUS, SAIQA WAS IN AN AMBIVALENT POSITION AND SOME SAIQA ELEMENTS MIGHT HAVE JOINED THE DEMONSTRATING FISHERMEN AND OTHER DEMONSTRATORS. HE CONTINUED, HOWEVER, THAT BY THE EVENING OF THE FIRST DAY OF THE DEMONSTRATIONS THE ORDERS HAD BEEN RECEIVED FROM DAMASCUS AND SAIQA, UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF ZOHAYR MUHSEN, WAS MOST HELPFUL. TAQLA ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT THIS MIGHT NOT HAVE APPLIED TO ALL INDIVIDUAL SYRIANS IN THE SIDON AREA, BUT HE WAS CONVINCED THAT IT DID APPLY TO THOSE UNDER SYRIAN GOVERNMENT CONTROL AND THAT MUHSEN HAD LOYALLY CARRIED OUT THE INSTRUCTIONS HE HAD RECEIVED FROM DAMASCUS.

4. I INQUIRED OF THE FOREIGN MINISTER RE CURRENT RELATIONS WITH SYRIA AND HE SAID THEY WERE EXCELLENT. HE COULD NOT YET EVALUATE ASAD'S PROPOSAL TO THE PLO REGARDING THE JOINT COMMAND, BUT AS OF THE MOMENT HE COULD NOT SEE NOTHING DELETERIOUS TO LEBANESE INTERESTS OR TO CONTINUED GOOD RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO NEIGHBORS.

5. I KNOW THAT TAQLA WOULD APPRECIATE ANY COMMENTS THAT THE DEPARTMENT OR AMBASSADOR MURPHY MIGHT CARE TO MAKE ON THE FOREGOING.
GODLEY

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NNN

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